

Gordon's Not Talking, But He's Still Dancing

By Nicole Plett

JOURNAL CORRESPONDENT

MUM'S THE WORD these days for audiences of dancer David Gordon. The choreographer who dazzled the contemporary dance scene with his penchant for

word play says that when the David Gordon/Pick Up Company makes its New Mexico debut this week, there will be no talking.

"I just stopped talking because I didn't have anything more to say, and I didn't want to say the same things again in another way," says Gordon, whose dancers frequently exchanged cryptic comments on the stage action. "And everybody else had started talking, which made it a really good time to stop."

Although Gordon isn't talking any more, the dances he performs with the 10-member Pick Up Company still employ the kinetic enigmas, double entendres and dance witticisms that established him as an American original. Critic Sali Ann Kriegsman, currently director of the National Endowment for the Arts dance program, described him as, "a vaudevillian, a weaver of yarns, a composer of riddles, a magician confounding expectations."

From the outset of his career, Gordon has engaged in a hide-and-seek game with critics who persist in pigeonholing their subjects. Gordon's least favorite pigeonhole is "postmodern." The term, he says, is meaningless.

"It is probably a little perverse of me, but I'm not interested in categories. And as soon as anybody tries to pin another label on me, I try to dodge my way out of it," he explains.

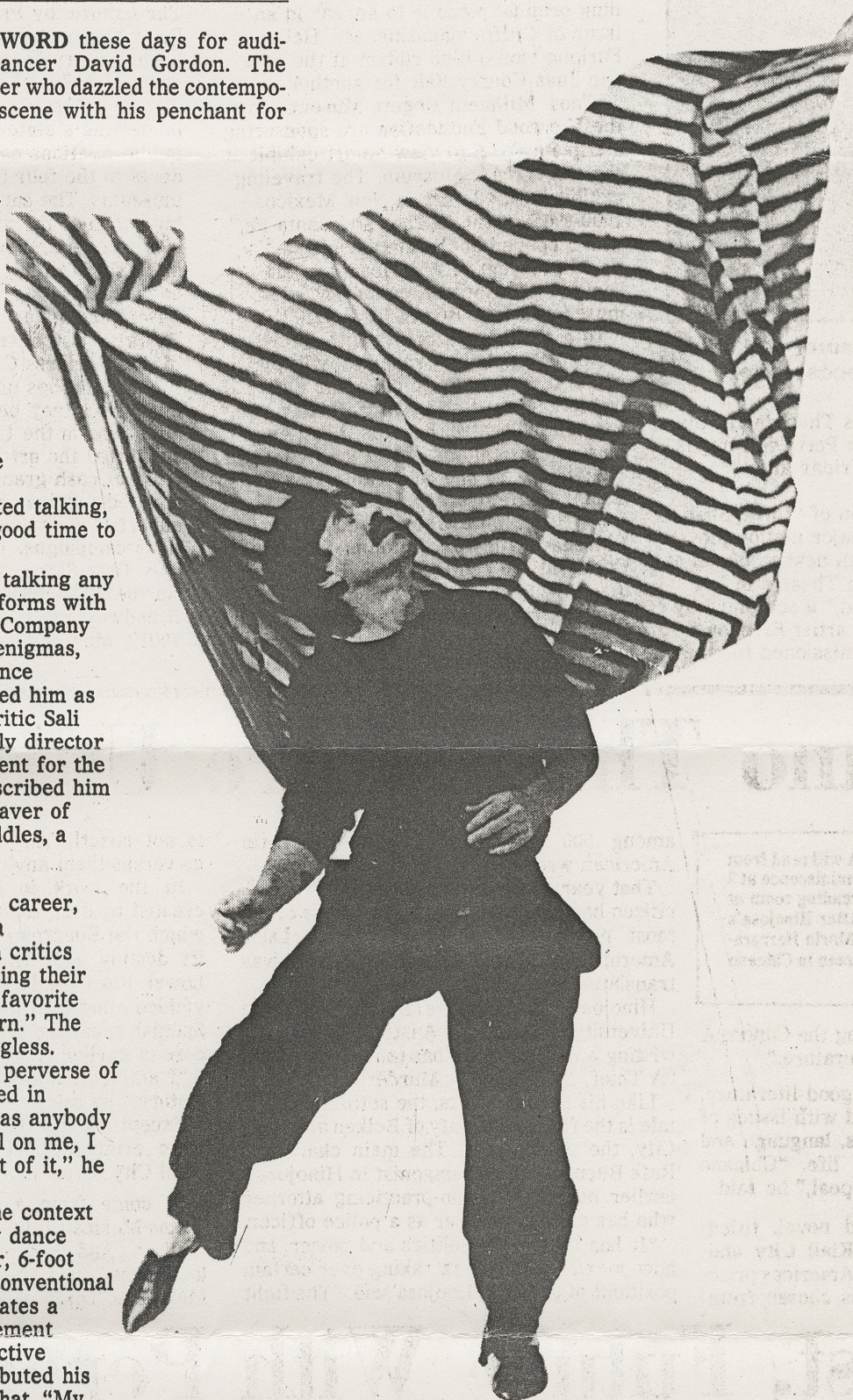
A maverick even in the context of his own revolutionary dance generation, the muscular, 6-foot Gordon doesn't fit any conventional dance mold. He manipulates a deceptively simple movement vocabulary through selective repetition. He once attributed his dance style to the fact that, "My leg never went up very high, and turning still makes me vomit."

Gordon says any mystery that exists in his work is simply part of that old theatrical magic.

"The audience is my partner in a performance. I have no secrets, I have no hidden agenda, I have no message I wish them to try and ferret out," he says. "Simply, we meet. I show them what I do. That's it."

Gordon was working toward a career in art at Brooklyn College when the late James Waring invited him to join his dance company. Waring, who helped open the boundaries of dance movement, is remembered especially for the wit he brought to the medium. Gordon began performing his own dances in 1960 and soon became part of the dance revolution that was the Judson Dance Theater.

Judson was a landmark series of experimental dances performed in New York's Judson Church in the early 1960s. Its loose-knit group of choreographic



David Gordon dances in his "My Folks," set for Santa Fe.

DAVID GORDON/PICK UP COMPANY performs at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the Armory for the Arts, 1050 Old Pecos Trail, Santa Fe. Tickets are \$12 and \$15. For reservations, call 988-1886.

originals included Trisha Brown, Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton and Lucinda Childs.

"When I started to make movement, the first thing that was not interesting to me was the idea that there was something that might be called happy movement or sad movement. I didn't like that. And so almost immediately I took gestural somethings that meant something and I put them together with something else, forcing them to now mean something else again,

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or at least to abandon their original meaning," says Gordon.

Gordon has an instinct for isolating the germ of familiar culture-bound movement and gesture. In an early Judson work, he sandwiched together movement from Spanish dance, striptease, show dance, Judy Garland movies and dances of the Judson Dance Theater itself.

Grand Union, which Gordon helped found in 1970, was the next proving ground for dance. Over its six-year history, this unique dance collective challenged the established power structures of the dance world. It tested just about every established notion about theater through the use of dialogue with the audience, social commentary, bizarre props and lengthy performance.

Today, much of the radical innovation of the 1960s has been incorporated into the artistic mainstream. Gordon choreographs for such companies as American Ballet Theatre. His most recent contribution to ABT repertory was the 1986 comedy, "Murder," featuring Mikhail Baryshnikov in multiple leading roles in a Victorian whodunit setting designed by Edward Gorey. In 1983, Gordon choreographed the Philip Glass opera, "The Photographer," at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Also on the program is "My Folks," a recent work inspired by Klezmer music. This music was created by traveling bands of Jewish musicians in middle Europe until it was eradicated by the Nazis.

The company's New Mexico program includes Gordon's latest work, "The Seasons," commissioned for the Brooklyn Academy's 1986 Next Wave Festival. His collaborator was composer Chuck Hammer, who created the four-section score, a sound collage of new and familiar music on seasonal themes.

The dance "Four Man Nine Lives" revolves around the nine lives of a chair that is subjected to a gymnastic assault by four male dancers. The chair is one of Gordon's favorite compositional devices that reappears in several works.

Also on the program is "My Folks," a recent work inspired by Klezmer music. This music was created and performed by traveling bands of Jewish musicians in middle Europe until it was eradicated by the Nazis.

"As a child I heard this music at weddings and things, but I didn't know it had a name, and I didn't

can to traced to the early band music of Benny Goodman and to Danny Kaye's fanciful scat singing.

Contrary to some critics' interpretation, Gordon says "My Folks" is not autobiographical. The work, he says, is as much athletic and theatrical as it is ethnic. "I have no particular story to tell about that kind of material. I use it in very much the same way I think I ever used anything — which is in a kind of referential way."

know it had a history," says Gordon. "Sound is a strong component in the work because Klezmer music is not a dismissable kind of music."

Encountering the music for the first time in years, Gordon recently became interested in its legacy. Brought to the United States by European refugees, its influence